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Victim former CIA spy

Police are searching for hit-and-run driver

By Randy Hagihara
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REDWOOD CITY — The Palo Alto man who was struck and killed by a hit-and-run motorist early Saturday morning was a former Central Intelligence Agency spy who had been involved in "some very famous CIA cases," the Times Tribune has learned.

Edward Ellis Smith, 60, was carrying a briefcase filled with notes on the CIA and the Russian KGB when he was struck by a white sports car shortly after midnight, Redwood City police said.

Traffic Sgt. Dick Morton said Saturday afternoon that the former spy's death was being handled as a felony hit-and-run accident, but left open the possibility that it may be investigated later as a homicide.

Smith, who had worked as an intelligence officer for the Army, State Department and the CIA, apparently was returning from a dinner engagement in San Francisco when he was struck by a white Chevrolet Corvette in a well-lit crosswalk at El Camino Real and James Avenue.

The driver of the car, described by witnesses as a young white male with light colored hair, drove away without stopping.

Traffic officers said the impact of the collision was so great that Smith was knocked out of one shoe and a sock as he was thrown over the top of the car.

Dressed in a beige trench coat, Smith was pronounced dead at the scene. He had received severe leg and head injuries, police said.

Officers worked through the night and most of Saturday trying to piece together the events leading up to the apparent accident.

Smith, who one acquaintance said did not own a car, probably took a train from San Francisco and disembarked at the Redwood City depot. Police speculated that he perhaps was on his way to meet someone when he was killed.

One unidentified Redwood City motorist told police he was driving south on El Camino Real when he was passed by a white Corvette traveling in the same direction.

"The Vette whizzed by him at a high rate of speed, ran a red light and struck Mr. Smith, who apparently was crossing in a marked crosswalk on a green light," Morton said.

Another witness, who was stopped at the intersection, said Smith had just walked past her car when she saw a "white streak and heard a thud," Morton said.

Officer Paul Jensen and reserve Officer Rick Nieto were about a block away on James Avenue writing out a traffic citation when Smith was struck.

Morton said the two officers reported hearing the screech of a car's brakes, then the sound of Smith's body being hit, and ran down the street in time to see "papers fluttering to the ground."

The intersection immediately was sealed off to preserve any evidence. Police found about 130 feet of skid marks and white paint chips.

Morton, who was later called to the scene, said he quickly glanced through the papers that had spilled onto the roadway from Smith's briefcase.

"I turned to one of the officers and said, 'There's some papers here that, if nothing else, are very interesting,'" he said.

He said most of the papers appeared to be handwritten notes from a yellow pad, with references to the CIA and KGB. He said he did see a page of one "official-looking document" that bore Smith's signature.

"My first impression was that he was some kind of author," Morton said.

The papers were turned over to the San Mateo County coroner's office along with the rest of Smith's possessions, he said.

"We are pursuing this as a felony hit-and-run fatality — until I get evidence to the contrary," said Morton. "All we can do is wait and see."

Smith was described Saturday as an "awfully nice man," though one neighbor later described him in terms that befit a spy.

He had lived alone for about three years at 101 Alma St., a high-rise condominium complex, one nextdoor neighbor said.

"I know darn little about him. He's a neighbor, but one you rarely see," said Edgar McDowell.

"There'd be days on end when I didn't see him," McDowell said. "He's just one of those persons that you don't know very much about."

Smith was most recently employed by Smith Bellingham International, Inc., a San Francisco brokerage firm.

His employer, David Smith, no relation, said in a telephone interview that the longtime Palo Alto resident had worked for the government as an intelligence officer for more than 20 years before retiring to private industry.

"He was involved in some very famous CIA cases," David Smith said.

A Russian-language expert, Edward Ellis Smith had traveled throughout the Soviet Union, serving in the U.S. Embassy in Moscow as the State Department's first full-time security chief in the mid-1950s. He previously had served at the embassy as an assistant military and economics attache.

A CIA spokesman in McClean, Va., Saturday declined to comment on Smith's death or previous employment.

Smith, who wrote a book on Josef Stalin in 1967, frequently contributed to the Palo Alto Times, writing mainly about Soviet affairs.